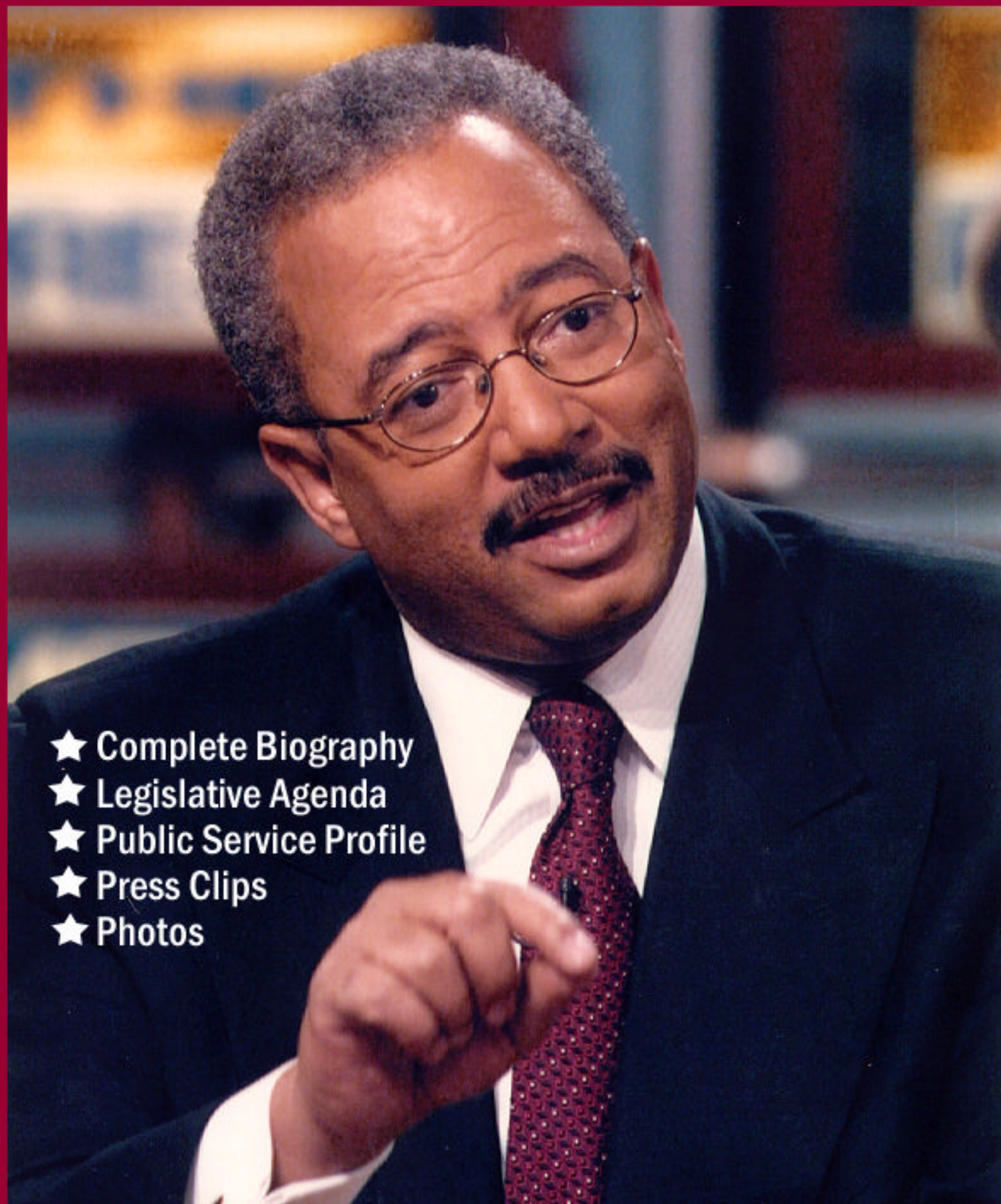


MEDIA KIT - US Congressman Chaka Fattah



- ★ Complete Biography
- ★ Legislative Agenda
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Representing Pennsylvania's 2nd District

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Mr. Fattah Goes To Washington

Rookie Of The Year Chaka Fattah Rode To Congress On A Landslide Problem Is, So Did The Other

Philadelphia Inquirer 01/15/95

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CONGRESSMAN CHAKA FATTAH

Chaka Fattah is an experienced lawmaker serving in his fourth term in the U.S. House of Representatives. Congressman Fattah represents the **Second Congressional District of Pennsylvania**, which includes parts of Philadelphia and Delaware County, PA.

SHAPING EDUCATIONAL POLICY

Congressman Fattah has spearheaded major initiatives in education policy. After working to gain bi-partisan support from members of the House, Congressman Fattah scored a legislative victory when his first major education initiative, **GEAR UP**, was passed in 1998. GEAR UP (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs) partners students from low-income schools with colleges and universities to help build an education pipeline for students to realize their college dreams. Including this fiscal year, there are 251 university partnerships and 28 state programs serving nearly 1.3 million students. Policy experts point to GEAR UP as one of the most innovative educational programs. The **William H. Gray College Completion Grant** is another Fattah legislative achievement designed to help nearly 18,000 low-income minority students successfully complete college. This program aims to retain college students by offering resources to help them complete college and be fully prepared for success in the workforce or in graduate school. To date, GEAR UP and the College Completion Grant have received nearly \$700 million in total combined funding.

COMMITTEE ASSIGNMENTS

In the 108th Congress, Congressman Fattah serves on the **Appropriations Committee**. This committee oversees \$600 billion in discretionary spending annually. As a member of this committee, Fattah serves on the **Subcommittee on VA-HUD & Independent Agencies**, and is the ranking member on the **Subcommittee on the District of Columbia**. Fattah is the youngest of the thirteen ranking Democrats currently serving on any of the Appropriations subcommittees. He is also the second ranking Democrat on the **Committee on House Administration**.

SUPPORTING SOUND LEGISLATION

Congressman Fattah supported the **Reauthorization to the Higher Education Act**, a measure that increased student aid, lowered interest rates on student loans and improved the quality of teaching in our nation's schools. Congressman Fattah assumed a key role in the development and negotiation of portions of the **Workforce Investment Partnership Act of 1998**, appropriated at \$5.7 billion for FY 2001. Fattah played a crucial role in the negotiations of the youth opportunity grants, a section authorizing \$1.1 billion over five years to direct resources to high-poverty areas, as well as increasing employment and school completion rates for low-income youth.

While education continues to be at the forefront of Congressman Fattah's legislative agenda, he has also been a prime co-sponsor of major initiatives in an array of public policy areas. In the 106th Congress, Fattah supported and co-sponsored the **African Growth and Opportunity Act**, a bill created to stimulate and sustain economic development in sub-Saharan Africa and the Caribbean. Fattah supported many initiatives that became public law in the 105th Congress, including: the **Drug Free Communities Act of 1997**, a program supporting 307 communities located in forty-nine states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands that provides funds and resources to help local leaders prevent drug problems affecting youth. Congressman Fattah was also a prime co-sponsor of the **District of Columbia Financial and Management Assistance Act**, which became public law in 1995. This measure helped the District regain its financial stability, and since its enactment the city has produced four consecutive balanced budgets.

CURRENT POLICY INITIATIVES

Congressman Fattah's top legislative priority is his Student Bill of Rights, which he announced on the 48th anniversary of *Brown vs. Board of Education*. The Student Bill of Rights will require States to certify with the Secretary of Education that their Public School System operates on an equal statewide basis in terms of offering all students access to some of the proven educational inputs necessary to achieve high academic outcomes. Therefore, for the first time ever, states will have an annual report card by which to be judged on for their ability to provide educational resources for all students.

Congressman Fattah's seven fundamentals for learning include: **1) Instruction from a highly qualified teacher; 2) Rigorous academic standards, curricula and methods of instruction; 3) Small class sizes; 4) Up-to-date textbooks; 5) Up-to-date libraries; 6) Up-to-date computers; 7) Quality guidance counseling.**

On an annual basis, The Student Bill of Rights will also **publicly identify** those states not providing these educational resources and penalize them with a loss of federal dollars if they do not comply.

COMMITMENT TO PUBLIC SERVICE

Experienced in all three levels of government—local, state and federal—Congressman Fattah spent 12 years in the **Pennsylvania Legislature**; he served six years as a state representative, and six years as a state senator. Congressman Fattah has held key leadership roles in both the **Pennsylvania Higher Education Facilities Authority** and the **Executive Committee of the Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency**, roles in which he helped 1.3 million students from Pennsylvania attend college. In 1986, he founded the annual **Fattah Conference on Higher Education**, which has motivated thousands of students to pursue graduate school opportunities. In addition, Fattah designed and implemented “**Read to Lead,**” a free summer reading program that provided books and classroom teaching for 5,000 children. Congressman Fattah is co-chair of the **Friends of the Caribbean Caucus**, a caucus created to address the needs and policy concerns of the Caribbean nations. In addition, Congressman Fattah co-chaired the **Web-based Education Commission**, which made recommendations into how the Internet is being used to enhance learning opportunities for all learners from pre-kindergarten through high school. He has served as a member of the Pennsylvania State Board of Education, on the Board of Trustees for Lincoln University, Temple University, Pennsylvania State University and Community College of Philadelphia. Congressman Fattah has been identified by *Time Magazine* as one of the 50 most promising leaders in the country, and has been a guest on NBC’s *Meet the Press* and MSNBC’s *Hardball*.

BACKGROUND AND EDUCATION

A life-long resident of Philadelphia, Congressman Fattah attended city public schools, the Community College of Philadelphia, the University of Pennsylvania Wharton School, and the University of Pennsylvania Fels School of State and Local Government where he earned a Master’s Degree in Government Administration. He also completed the Senior Executive Program for State Officials at Harvard University’s John F. Kennedy School of Government. Congressman Fattah is married to Renee Chenault-Fattah, and has a family of four children.

Public Service Profile Chaka Fattah

Elected Offices:

(1995- present) United States Congressman, Second District (D-PA)

Serves on the following committees:

Appropriations

House Administration

Founding Chair, the Philadelphia Federal Funds Forum

Served as Congressional Black Caucus Whip during the 104th Congress

(1989 - 1994) Pennsylvania State Senator, Seventh District (D-PA)

Served as Chairman of the Senate Education Committee, as a Freshman lawmaker

Minority Chair of the State Government Committee

(1983 - 1988) Pennsylvania State Representative, 192nd District (D-PA)

Chair of the Urban Affairs Subcommittee

Served on the Education Committee

Prior to elected office, Chaka Fattah held the following positions:

Special Assistant to the Managing Director, City of Philadelphia

Special Assistant to the Director of Housing and Community Development, City of Philadelphia

Policy Assistant at the Greater Philadelphia Partnership

Assistant Director at the House of Umoja

Prior positions held:

Chairman of the Pennsylvania Higher Education Facilities Authority

Chairman of the Executive Board of the Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency

Member of the Pennsylvania State Board of Education

Trustee of Community College of Philadelphia and Temple, Lincoln and Penn State Universities

Education:

Congressman Fattah attended Philadelphia public schools, Community College of Philadelphia, the University of Pennsylvania Wharton School, and the University of Pennsylvania Fels School of State and Local Government, where he earned a Master's Degree in Government Administration. He also completed the Senior Executive Program for State Officials at Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government.

Honors:

Congressman Fattah's career in public service has resulted in many honors including: the Pennsylvania Public Interest Coalition's State Legislator of the Year Award, the Excellence in Education Award for distinguished service from the Philadelphia Board of Education, and the Philadelphia Jaycees 1995 Outstanding Young Leader Award. He has received international recognition as a member of the British/American Project for the Successor Generation. Congressman Fattah has also received honorary doctorates from Philadelphia College of Pharmacy and Science, Philadelphia College of Textiles and Science, Drexel University, and St. Paul's College of Lawrenceville, Virginia.

Congressman Fattah is married to Renee Chenault-Fattah and they have a blended family of three children.

Legislative Agenda

The brainchild of Congressman Fattah, **GEAR UP** (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs) encourages young people to stay in school, study hard, and have high expectations for themselves. This \$295 million program partners middle school students from low-income schools with colleges and universities. Affecting over 1.3 million children around the country, GEAR UP informs middle school students of the financial aid available for college and then promotes rigorous academic standards to prepare these young people for college.

The College Completion Challenge Grant became another legislative win for Congressman Fattah last year. The first major education legislation to address college completion as an obstacle for students from low-income homes, this grant program that will affect nearly 18,000 students who wish to complete their college education.

Congressman Fattah also played a key role in the **Workforce Investment Partnership Act of 1998**. The bill establishes a coordinated system of federal aid programs for vocational education, adult education, and job training at State and local levels. Congressman Fattah played a crucial role in the negotiations of the youth opportunity grants. This section authorizes \$1.25 billion over five years in youth opportunity grants to direct resources to high-poverty areas. It also provides comprehensive services designed to increase employment and school completion rates for low-income youth.

As an original cosponsor of the **African Growth and Opportunity Act**, Congressman Fattah championed the bill that provides the necessary framework for economic development in the world's poorest countries.

Congressman Fattah is also working on a number of pieces of legislation he hopes to become law.

His top priority is the **Equal Protection School Finance Act, HR 1234**, a bill that seeks to end the wide funding disparities that currently exists in education. This legislation establishes this equalization as a precondition for the receipt of federal funds for education.

Another Fattah initiative, **The American Communities Investment Act** focuses Congress on the creation of world-class cities in America. The bill provides a vehicle for cities to leverage more cash and capital for neighborhood improvements by expanding on the borrowing power of cities through the Dept. of Housing and Development's Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Section 108 program. Instead of the current piecemeal method, cities can in essence, mortgage CDBG projects valued at many times their current CDBG entitlement through community development financial institutions for up to 20 years. This approach uses CDBG entitlements as collateral.

Congressman Fattah's **American Profit Sharing Act** requires that Federal contracts and Federal subsidies be made available only to certain businesses that have IRS qualified profit sharing plans for all employees. Although company profits and employee productivity have improved, living conditions of many working Americans have worsened, as they face layoffs, lost dreams, dwindling bank accounts and economic uncertainty. The Federal Government, as a major entity, should use its influence on the economy to promote measures that increase the wealth of individuals and that move the economy in the direction of a more balanced income distribution system.

The **Cash Consumer Protection Act** prohibits merchants from requiring that consumers have credit cards to make retail transactions. Consumers are finding it increasingly difficult to survive in today's world without credit cards. However, it is a fundamental inequity to penalize

consumers for making the choice of cash over credit. The Cash Consumer Protection Act simply protects those who do make this choice.

Public Service -- Results

Education

Through his leadership as Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency (PHEAA), Chaka Fattah, helped over 1.3 million students from Pennsylvania attend college. In Philadelphia alone, students received \$111 million in State Grants and \$509 million in loans to further their education.

Bridging the gap between educators and minority students, Chaka Fattah founded the annual Graduate Opportunity Conference, a three day seminar on graduate possibilities. Over the past thirteen years, this conference on higher education has raised over \$8 million in scholarship funding for thousands of Pennsylvania college students.

Ensuring that children would keep up in their studies, Chaka Fattah secured funding for *Read to Lead*, a free summer reading program that provided books and classroom teaching for 5,000 children at 50 sites in Philadelphia during the summer recess. Building upon this pilot program, there is now a full-fledged city sponsored summer reading program for children.

Jobs

Chaka Fattah sponsored the 1987 Employment Opportunities Act, the centerpiece of a three bill program, that helped move 300,000 people off of Welfare and into jobs.

As a freshman state lawmaker, Chaka Fattah and a select group of other Democratic legislators developed and enacted Penn Pride, an innovative \$140 million jobs and business development initiative that included job training, youth conservation, and employee entrepreneurial programs, to improve Pennsylvania's economy.

Urban Issues

When Philadelphia was on the brink of bankruptcy, Chaka Fattah raised \$34 million from city businesses and investors in just one week, and helped keep the City solvent.

Chaka Fattah founded the "*Drug Free*" campaign, an initiative which promoted and simplified access to drug treatment and recovery for thousands of addicted persons and their families. In the U.S. Congress, Chaka Fattah cosponsored a similar idea that became law. That bill established a program to support and encourage local communities that first demonstrate a comprehensive, long term commitment to reduce substance abuse among youth.

Chaka Fattah provided a blueprint to improve living conditions for 3,400 families -- moving them from high-rise, crime ridden public housing towers, to vacant single family homes around Philadelphia. As a Congressman, Fattah has led the way to provide tens of millions of dollars to provide better housing -- bringing the high-rises down and building homes.

Using his knowledge of what works for cities, Chaka Fattah cosponsored a bill that eliminates the budget deficits and management insufficiencies in the District of Columbia. This new law mirrors the PICA bill that rescued Philadelphia, which Chaka Fattah cosponsored.

Public Service Report Card

When *Time Magazine* identified the 50 promising leaders in the country, they put Congressman Fattah and his work for cities and students on the same page as Bill Gates, for his work with computer innovation and expansion.

When *The Hill*, a Capitol Hill newspaper, described leaders for the future in the Democratic Party, they chose Congressman Fattah and just a few others: House Leader Gephardt, Senate Leader Daschle, and Secretary of Energy Richardson.

When *Roll Call*, another Capitol Hill newspaper, singled out one Member of Congress for his energy and charisma, they chose Congressman Fattah.

When *Washingtonian Magazine* reported on the rising stars on Capitol Hill, they selected just a handful of Democrats, including Congressman Fattah.

When *Philadelphia Magazine* reviewed the Tri-State area's Congressional delegation, they chose Congressman Fattah as "a young, intelligent go-getter who stands up for cities and the poor."

When *The Chronicle of Higher Education* spotlighted a "winner" for his legislative ability in expanding opportunities in higher education, they chose Congressman Fattah.

When *Black Issues in Higher Education* profiled "a political champion for education," they selected Congressman Fattah.

When *Meet the Press*, the *News Hour with Jim Lehrer*, National Public Radio's *Talk of the Nation* Show, MSNBC's *Hardball with Chris Mathews* and Fox News need a guest commentator, they regularly ask Congressman Fattah.

When national organizations ranging from the National Urban League and the National Association of Social Workers, to the National Black Caucus of State Legislators, the National Baptists Convention, and AFL-CIO, were seeking to be addressed at a national convention, they all chose Congressman Fattah.

When major education organizations such as the College Board, Council of Great City Schools, National Conference of Blacks in Higher Education, and the National Student Financial Aid Organization, National Association of College Admission Counseling, and National Black Child Development Institute needed a speaker with education policy experience, they selected Congressman Fattah.

Press Clips

Edison Faces Tough Sledding in the Philadelphia Takeover

The New York Times

Editorial Observer/Brent Staples

February 24, 2002

The Philadelphia public school system has embarked on the most significant education experiment since compulsory schooling became popular more than a century ago. After years of failure and yawning deficits, the state has superseded the city school board with a commission that has broad authority to remake the school district, seventh-largest in the nation, in almost any way it chooses. The commission could privatize the whole system, make every school a charter school or recreate the district as a novel hybrid.

The commission's decisions are expected sometime this spring. Meanwhile, anxiety about the impending transformation has taken the form of a widespread contempt for bow ties. Not just any bow ties, but the ones worn by Christopher Whittle, the president and chief executive of Edison Schools Inc., which is involved in a bitter school takeover fight in Philadelphia.

Edison, a for-profit company, has been jockeying for more than a year to assume control of what it hoped would be the lion's share of the Philadelphia school system, which has about 20,000 employees, 200,000 students and a \$1.7 billion budget.

Mr. Whittle's bow ties have been getting the Big Dis (the hip-hop term for "disrespect") in bars, living rooms and churches all over Philadelphia. The Philadelphia Inquirer described the neckwear as a ruse designed to make Mr. Whittle seem like a kindly professor instead of "a sly and cunning media mogul, a fox in the Cat in the Hat's clothing." The barbs are a bad sign for Edison, which is counting on a healthy Philadelphia contract to put the company into the black for the first time.

The backlash in Philadelphia shows how deeply communities feel about maintaining control of even failing schools. Companies that wish to annex entire systems will need to cultivate many constituencies, including politicians, unions and parents, and the companies that fear losing contracts with the local schools.

Edison seemed a shoo-in to run the entire system when it swaggered into Philadelphia riding shotgun for Gov. Tom Ridge, who has since departed for Washington and the Office of Homeland Security. As governor, Mr. Ridge was determined to persuade the system to privatize as much as possible in return for a new infusion of cash from the state. After several public relations blunders by Edison, the reform commission has begun to distance itself from the company, suggesting that Edison will play a smaller role in the new system than was previously thought.

Pennsylvania's education law allows the state to take over fiscally distressed districts like Philadelphia's, which has been facing huge deficits for years and has often come close to failing to meet its payroll. The law specifies a five-member School Reform Commission, with four members appointed by the governor and one by the mayor, that can do virtually anything it wants. It can cancel all collective bargaining agreements, except the one between the system and its teachers. The exemption for the teachers shows how powerful the teachers' union has become in Pennsylvania.

The negotiations between the city and state over the terms of the takeover seemed at least civil until Governor Ridge paid Edison \$2.7 million to conduct a study of the Philadelphia city schools and recommend structural changes. The report drew criticism for undervaluing important developments like rising test scores and a new fiscal discipline that has emerged in recent years.

The report was also attacked for what many considered shoddy research and for the fact that Edison was being considered for the front-line management of city schools as well as for the job of managing the central administration. The possibility that the city might lose control of its central administration - with 20,000 jobs and contracts for everything from pencils to paper towels - prompted protests in the streets and rallied the system's suppliers against the takeover.

The state backed down and gave Mayor John Street two of the five appointments on the reform board, instead of the single appointment mandated by the law. One of the mayor's appointees was Sandra Dungee Glenn, a fiery political organizer whose elevation illustrates how sharply Edison's fortunes have shifted in the city. Ms. Dungee Glenn said in a recent interview that Edison had "put itself in harm's way" by behaving arrogantly toward the city. "They thought we were slow and stupid and that they'd be done before we caught up with them," she said.

The most common criticism of Edison in Philadelphia is that it cares more about reassuring the stock market than calming parents, who have been understandably frightened about the impending takeover. The company's biggest mistake was aligning itself too closely with a state government that has historically beaten up on city schools while failing to alleviate the financing inequities that helped cripple the system in the first place.

Edison has also failed to build sufficient grass-roots support, leaving the field to the antiprivatization machine associated with a charismatic Philadelphia congressman, Chaka Fattah, whose supporters view the takeover as an attempt to dismantle public education permanently. Mr. Fattah has battered Edison with reports describing the company's record in other cities as poor and has sued Edison, charging that its arrangement with the state violates conflict-of-interest laws.

This situation is a partial replay of what happened in the nearby city of Chester, Pa., a failing system that was also taken over by the state. Edison had put out the word in the State Legislature that it expected to be awarded the entire school system, but it was outmaneuvered by a small upstart company called LearnNow, whose employees knocked on doors and sat on neighborhood porches. It was eventually awarded about half of all the students in the city. Edison got LearnNow's share of the pie by buying the company, but it seems to have learned little from being bested on the ground in Chester.

The task of building community trust in Philadelphia has fallen to the reform commission's chairman, James Nevels, a soft-spoken lawyer and investment fund executive who helped oversee the Chester takeover as well. In recent weeks, Mr. Nevels has told audiences around the city not to confuse Edison with the commission - a clear attempt to shield the reform effort from the anger that surrounds the company.

Edison argues that it has done the best it could in a politically dicey situation. But Philadelphia provides a prime example of how not to proceed in revamping school management. The next time Edison moves into a city, its forces should try knocking on more doors, visiting more church socials and leaving those bow ties back at the office.

No easy remedy in Philly

The Denver Post

January 4, 2002 Friday 2D Edition

Section: Denver & The West; Pg. B-10

471 words

Editorial

Although classes resumed Wednesday for Philadelphia's 200,000 public school students, major changes from the state takeover of city schools aren't expected till September.

Heated controversy continues, however, over the state's push to give Edison Schools Inc. a \$ 101 million contract as district consultant and operator of up to 45 of Philly's 60 worst schools.

The latest salvo came from U.S. Rep. Chaka **Fattah**, whose office reviewed Edison schools using the same criteria Edison employed to indict Philadelphia schools. An 'overwhelming majority' of Edison schools - including those in Colorado - perform poorly, and some do even worse than some Philadelphia schools, **Fattah** found. Using state test results from 20 states and the District of Columbia, **Fattah's** review found poor performance in Edison schools. Roosevelt-Edison Charter School in Colorado Springs and Wyatt-Edison Charter School in Denver both have high percentages of students in grades three through six scoring below the state average.

Even schools operated by Edison since the mid-'90s have yet to show improvement. So Pennsylvania appears misguided in expecting an Edison miracle in Philadelphia schools.

Besides its lackluster academic performance, Edison also struggles to make a profit. And its selection by Pennsylvania leaders has been criticized as fraught with conflicts:

Before President Bush named him director of homeland security, then-Gov. Tom Ridge paid Edison \$ 2.7 million to study Philadelphia schools and recommend reforms. Many observers questioned why an independent group or panel of experts wasn't chosen instead.

Edison's ensuing report was superficial and based partly on flawed information, city officials and independent experts say. And the report's self-serving conclusion recommended that a private firm be hired to help run the schools.

Gov. Mark Schweiker then recommended that Edison run the district and hire itself to operate underperforming schools, meaning it eventually would evaluate its own results.

But State Treasurer Barbara Hafer, a Republican gubernatorial candidate, advised late last month that any consulting or management contract should undergo a competitive, open bid process.

Now the Commonwealth Court and state Supreme Court are reviewing a lawsuit filed by employee unions and activist groups, citing state laws that forbid a state consultant from participating in recommendations it makes.

However unfortunate, the Philadelphia fracas does serve as a useful reminder for other states. Neither private firms nor public charters offer a magic bullet for school reform. The complex problems of failing schools require far more thoughtful, comprehensive remedies.

Fattah: Force equal school funding; Wants Same \$\$ Spent In Urban, Suburban, Rural

Philadelphia Daily News

June 18, 2001

Monday 4Star Edition

Section: Local; Pg. 05

713 words

John M. Baer

As tension between Philadelphia and Harrisburg tightens again in the never-ending fight over funding schools, it may be that the long-term answer comes not from the city, not the state but from the nation's capital.

Even though something of a bit player in education - most school money is local and state - Congress controls enough dollars (more than \$1 billion in Pennsylvania) to get anybody's attention.

That's why U.S. Rep. Chaka **Fattah**, D-Pa., is worth watching.

He wants to use federal power to end the schools fight by forcing states to equalize funding among urban, rural and suburban districts. Assuming the suburbs would never spend less, that means huge gains for city and rural schools and resolution of Philly's annual crisis.

"States have figured out how to educate kids in the suburbs," Fattah says, "I don't know why they can't do it in rural and urban areas. . .it is the central issue of school reform."

Fattah says that if states do not fix spending inequities they should lose federal dollars. It's more than words. Moving quickly after Democrats took Senate control, Fattah actually got a vote on the issue by working with bigwig Democratic Sens. Chris Dodd, of Connecticut and Ted Kennedy, of Massachusetts.

He lost, 58-42, last week (Arlen Specter and Rick Santorum joined other Republicans voting "no"). But the measure got more support than vouchers, and Fattah's back this week pushing the effort again.

With the president's education bill headed to a conference committee where versions just passed by each house of Congress get tweaked in a final compromise measure, Fattah sees a chance for progress.

"I think as some reflection of the support we've shown - remember, the Senate never debated this issue before and we came relatively close - we can get something in the final bill," he said.

That "something" is updated per-pupil spending data or a requirement that states come up with equity plans within five years.

"I think we'll at least get the data," Fattah said, "what we have now is three, four years old. And when we see the data, we will remove from the arsenal of our critics the argument 'it's not about money.' "

Fattah says it is about money, and a system that's fiscally unfair.

Right now, because schools rely on property taxes, the better the area, the better the schools.

"Forty-five school districts surrounding Philadelphia average \$2,000 per pupil more than Philadelphia each year, every year," Fattah said.

Because of such disparity, city and rural districts in Pennsylvania and in a majority of states are suing for

new funding systems.

Other states, Michigan and Vermont, for example, have gone to a dedicated sales tax or a restructured property tax.

Fattah, years ago, proposed shifting school funding from property taxes to a surtax on income.

The argument is that Philly, because of tax-exempt hospitals, universities, historic sites and low real estate values, cannot adequately fund schools through property taxes.

But taxing all for the troubles of city and farm is, Fattah concedes, a tough sell. As is using federal dollars to chase down states. Which is why he's after new allies: "I have to find a few more Democrats, maybe a moderate Republican like Specter. . .he should empathize, he cares about Philly, and rural schools. His home state of Kansas is one that's suing."

Specter told me he and Fattah could team up.

He said he voted "no" on Fattah's measure only after it was clear it would fail. He said he was the last senator to vote: "I am supportive [but]. . .there has to be some moderation about voting against the party when it's futile." He added, "I'm very interested" in working with Fattah on adequate funding for schools.

So while Harrisburg digs in its heels and Philadelphia points its finger, Washington could hold the answer.

It won't come fast. It won't come easy. But Fattah has zeal, Specter experience, and Fattah's committed: "Every chance I get I'm bringing this up. . .you can't have a society in which half the children have everything to look forward to and half have nothing to look forward to. . .[and] you can't sit comfortably in the suburbs and say, 'I don't care if these kids get an education.' " *

Send e-mail to baerj@phillynews.com

Lawmaker Seeks Action on Special Education Report

Black Issues in Higher Education

October 21, 2001

A House Democrat is asking President Bush to investigate reports that African American children are almost three times more likely than Whites to be assigned to special education classes.

The issue of mislabeling is of "enormous concern" to African Americans, says Rep. Chaka **Fattah**, D-Pa., in a letter to Bush and other Republican leaders. The lawmaker was responding to the findings of a Harvard University study that found many African Americans are unfairly placed in special education, where student progress is slow and teachers often are in short supply (see related story).

While he has had suspicions about mislabeling for some time, the study from Harvard's Civil Rights Project "provides convincing evidence of the wrongful treatment of African Americans and other minority students," Fattah says.

"If you truly believe that, 'All of our citizens are created equal, and must be treated equally,' then you will agree that racial discrimination has no place in our society, particularly not in our public school system," Fattah told the president.

Among other conclusions, the Harvard study said misclassification of children and poor services to children in special education may deny these students equal opportunity.

Fattah is recommending that Bush conduct an investigation through the Department of Education and the Department of Justice's civil rights division.

Fattah Vows To Keep Fighting For

The Philadelphia Inquirer

MAY 30, 2000

Tuesday SF EDITION

SECTION: LOCAL; Pg. A01

1026 words

BYLINE: Peter Nicholas, INQUIRER WASHINGTON BUREAU

Again and again, U.S. Rep Chaka **Fattah** has tried, and failed, to persuade his fellow members of Congress to pass a bill pressuring states to ensure that their poorest school districts spend as much on students as do the wealthiest.

But the Philadelphia Democrat isn't giving up. Inspired by a congressman from another era, Adam Clayton Powell Jr., **Fattah** plans to offer his bill every chance he gets until it passes.

"This is the most important legislative work that I will do as a lawmaker, and it will pass," he said. **Fattah's** measure would withhold federal funds from states that fail to equalize spending across their school districts. The federal government's contribution to local districts isn't huge - experts put it at 6 to 7 percent - but **Fattah** believes states nevertheless would be hard-pressed to turn their back on those education dollars.

Fattah's district clearly would benefit from the legislation. In recent years, the Philadelphia public school system has been outspent nearly 2-to-1 by some of its suburban counterparts. In 1997-98, the most recent year for which data were available, per-pupil spending in Philadelphia was \$6,969, compared with \$13,287 in nearby Radnor.

Fattah wants to narrow gaps such as that one, though his legislation does not instruct states how to do it.

His approach worries some of his colleagues, who warn of slapping the states with a crippling financial burden.

"You're either going to have to artificially cap the rich districts or you're going to set up an unrealistic expectation that you're going to bring everyone up to the highest level," said Bucks County Republican James C. Greenwood, who serves with **Fattah** on the House Education and the Workforce Committee.

Others wonder if yanking federal funds wouldn't harm the very students **Fattah** wants to help. Most federal dollars go to special education and Title I programs designed to help children at risk of failing, said Mary Fulton, a policy analyst with the Education Commission of the States, a nonprofit group based in Denver.

"In the big picture, the federal government is contributing a much smaller amount," Fulton said. "However, some of that money . . . is very important to certain districts."

In a Congress dominated by Republicans, **Fattah's** measure hasn't had much success. In October, it was defeated, 183-235, in a vote largely along party lines. **Fattah** has offered the measure five times in the Education Committee, without success.

Rep. Bill Goodling (R., Pa.), chairman of the Education Committee, said in a statement: "I do not believe that the matter is an issue for the federal government's involvement, and the majority on the committee agrees with that philosophy. School funding is a state matter, not an issue to be decided in Congress."

Still, **Fattah** isn't giving up. He adopted the strategy of repeatedly offering the bill after reading up on Powell, the flamboyant pastor of Harlem's Abyssinian Baptist Church who was one of the country's most visible black politicians during his congressional tenure from 1944 to 1970.

His threat to attach the "Powell Amendment" - denying federal funds to any program or facility involved in racial discrimination - to dozens of segregationist bills won him power and influence. And while the amendment itself never was passed, its basic premise became the law of the land in the 1964 Civil Rights Act.

Powell's perseverance made an impression on **Fattah**, who said he admired the congressman's "tenacity in pursuing one particular legislative goal, which was to use the carrot of federal dollars to remove legal segregation in states."

Realistically, **Fattah** thinks his best chance to pass his education bill may be the first six months of next year - assuming the Democrats pick up six seats and re-take the House. But he believes his efforts in this Congress are not wasted because he is drawing attention to the issue and offering a federal legislative remedy to a problem that most states have addressed with only mixed results through lawsuits.

"The status quo is indefensible," **Fattah** said. "People want something done about failing schools."

In Philadelphia, as in many poor school districts throughout the country, officials have used the courts to try to end the disparity in per-pupil spending. The city has filed suit in federal court contending that the state's education financing formula discriminates against districts with large numbers of minority students.

At issue is the fact that school systems are financed largely by local property taxes, which creates big gaps in spending among communities, based upon their respective wealth. Philadelphia gets \$3,000 per student from the state, compared to only \$400 per student in the most affluent districts. But because Philadelphia can't match the local property tax contributions made by those communities, its total per-pupil spending lags.

Courts in 36 states have split down the middle in upholding or overturning education-financing formulas that have resulted in huge gulfs between rich and poor school systems.

In Georgia, Democratic Gov. Roy Barnes did not wait for a court order to announce five months ago that he wanted to equalize financing for the state's public schools, redistributing tax money to help poor districts keep up with their wealthier counterparts. The state legislature passed Barnes' school reform bill in April.

Even if efforts like Georgia's succeed, however, critics wonder about the end result. If states come up with the extra money, will that necessarily improve academic performance? If states can't find the money, will they achieve compliance on the cheap - bringing down spending in the wealthier districts in the name of equalization?

"If the emphasis is on preventing communities from investing more in education, that's not consistent with what we believe," said Tim Reeves, spokesman for Gov. Ridge of Pennsylvania.

Fattah expects that states will respond by stepping up investments in the poorer districts. As to the price tag, he asks: "What is the cost of ignorance?"

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Clinton Pushes Education Program; Stay In School, He Tells Students

The Washington Post

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BYLINE: Debbie Goldberg , Special to The Washington Post

President Clinton told an audience of inner-city middle-school students today that today's technology revolution will lift more people out of poverty more quickly than anything before it. But he exhorted them, "you've got to stay in school."

Clinton was at the Mayer Sulzberger Middle School here to support GEAR UP, a new federal program designed to help pave the way to college for disadvantaged students by exposing them to information on college requirements and financial aid as early as sixth and seventh grades.

"I believe that education is equally distributed in this world, but opportunity isn't," the president said to cheers from several hundred students, parents and teachers at the West Philadelphia school. "We've done everything we could to eliminate the financial barriers" to college, Clinton said, "but children have to live in an environment where excellence is expected." Clinton was introduced by Toya Doe, a seventh-grade Sulzberger student from a family of 10 children who said participating in the GEAR UP program this year has motivated her to plan for college. "Now I know what it takes to fulfill my dream of becoming a teacher," Doe said.

Clinton also used his school visit to urge Congress to pass his education reform initiatives, including funds for school repair and construction, hiring more teachers and stricter accountability for failing schools.

The president said he will ask Congress to allow tax deductions of up to 28 percent of the cost of college tuition payments up to \$ 10,000. In addition, he announced a new round of grants totaling \$ 185 million for existing after-school and summer school programs.

On other matters, Clinton applauded the New Jersey State Senate for voting for tougher gun regulations this week, including an increase in the legal age for gun ownership to 21. Clinton said he also supports the development of so-called smart guns that could only be fired by their owners. "Students have to be safe in school and on their way to and from school," Clinton said.

The GEAR UP program, which stands for Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs, is designed to put low-income, middle-school students on the path to higher education through better academic preparation, mentoring and tutoring services, and a promise of federal financial aid to those who make it to college.

This year, its first in operation, some 450,000 middle school students nationwide participated in the program, which includes partnerships with universities, businesses and community groups. To qualify for the program, at least half of a school's students must be from low-income families.

Also present today was Rep. Chaka **Fattah** (D-Pa.), whose district includes Sulzberger Middle School, and who was the prime congressional sponsor of GEAR UP. Clinton also introduced Rep. Ron Klink, a Democrat from the Pittsburgh area who is facing a tough battle this fall to try to unseat Sen. Rick Santorum (R).

Clinton's visit to the West Philadelphia school was sandwiched between a fundraising luncheon at City

Hall for the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, and a campaign stop for Rep. Joseph M. Hoeffel III, a first-term House member facing a tough reelection bid in his suburban Philadelphia district.

Clinton avoided any references to the presidential race during his school appearance. But earlier, at the party fundraising luncheon, he took the opportunity to blast presumptive Republican presidential nominee George W. Bush's plan to allow people to invest a portion of their Social Security payroll taxes in the stock market. "You will shrink the number of years it takes for the thing [Social Security system] to go broke, because there will be less money being paid in," he said.

Clinton cited several other issues where he thinks the GOP is wrong.

On crime: "Their policy is, I have to drag them kicking and screaming to get any more for police."

On Medicare: "They say our program is too costly. We say theirs doesn't really do the job."

On a nuclear test ban treaty: "They believe it's an anachronistic document."

On the economy: "There's a huge difference here. It cannot be papered over. Do we think this economic policy is on automatic and you couldn't mess it up if you tried? I can tell you, I don't believe that."

He said there are "massive differences" on environmental policy and health care, "huge differences" on hate crimes and a minimum wage increase.

"It's not a personal attack," Clinton said. "I'm saying we have honest differences. The divides between us, I think, are clear and I believe we're right."

At the same time, Clinton appealed to Democrats and Republicans to campaign fairly and with civility. "What I hope will happen is that we will not have a mean election. We don't have to say they are bad people," he said. "We should assume we have two honorable people running for president, honorable people running for Congress. We intend to do what we say, they intend to do what they say. And you need to say, 'Where are the differences and what are the consequences?' "

Capitol Hill's odd couple

Guess what happens when a white conservative and a black liberal join forces?

Salon.com

By Jake Tapper

June 10, 1999

WASHINGTON -- These aren't exactly salad days for African-American liberals in Congress. The conventional wisdom has it that their time in American politics has come and gone, replaced by fights over the very existence of affirmative action, and by a Democrat in the White House who brags about signing a Republican-authored welfare reform bill.

But you wouldn't have known this in March 1998, when the House Education and Workforce Committee began to vote on the pet project of Philadelphia Democrat Chaka Fattah. Known as the [GEAR UP](#) initiative, it would devote \$120 million to spread the word to low-income grade- and high school students about federal college aid money.

The committee's 19 Democrats, of course, backed Fattah's bill solidly. The Republicans were a different story. Many, led by committee Chairman William Goodling, voted against it -- but there were a handful of notable exceptions. Like Mark Souder, a conservative Republican from Indiana and member of the legendary GOP class of '94. And Joe Scarborough, a Floridian, also of the class of '94. And Indiana's David McIntosh. And Pennsylvania's John Peterson. And Michigan's Fred Upton.

And, at the end of the day, due to the support of these GOP conservatives, GEAR UP passed.

So, what happened here? The alliance seems odd -- black and white, Democrat and Republican, left and right. But it's indicative of a small, if growing, trend that exemplifies three new strains in American politics: the "compassionate conservatism" preached by Texas Gov. [George W. Bush](#), the pragmatism of a new generation of African-American congressmen and the fact that some of the best initiatives to help the poor and rebuild the inner city are coming from community activists who preach a brand of self-help that Republicans can relate to.

Fattah, a minority member of the overwhelmingly Republican class of '94, attributes part of his willingness to work with conservative Republicans to the fact that as a 12-year state legislator in Harrisburg, he was forced to learn how to function as a member of the minority party, "unlike some Democrats here, who have never [previously] experienced being in the minority," he observes. "You have a couple choices. And one of them is trying to get something done."

"Some of it's generational politics," says Rep. Harold Ford Jr., D-Tenn., who just turned 29 last month, and is a member of the class of '96. "A lot of the new guys associated with the more conservative wing of the Republican Party bring an approach to governing that's all about what works."

From the other side of the aisle, Souder sees possibility as well. "There's a group of young African-American leaders who are willing to work with Republicans, and focus on economic opportunities, rather than just do finger-pointing," he says.

Ford says the personal relationships he's established with individuals like Rep. Mark Sanford, R-S.C., certainly help. "We're all new members, or relatively new members," he says, "and some of us are closer in age than we are with members of our own party. We play basketball every day in the House gym, and we work out together, so the relationships are there. And while I certainly wouldn't betray my convictions

based on the fact that we lift weights together, because the relationships are there, there's a willingness to at least listen."

Souder agrees. "There's a comfort among members that you wouldn't expect from the news media, which suggests that we're in armed camps with Uzis pointed at one another."

Ford and his buddy Sanford are friends more than allies; their relationship has yet to manifest itself in legislation. But Fattah and Souder found their friendship based in something slightly more substantive than court-side camaraderie, and it's why GEAR UP is now the law of the land.

When Souder was a staffer for then-Rep. Dan Coates, R-Ind., in the mid-1980s, he was admonished by the head of the Philadelphia chapter of the Urban League. "Don't just be a typical white guy who just sits on his duff and pronounces what's wrong with minorities. Go out there and talk to them," Souder recalls him saying.

So Souder visited a Philly youth center run by Fattah's parents. "They had taken a lot of kids in and put them under one roof," Souder says. "It helped turn their neighborhood around, and they formed a relatively stable model of what can be done in city programs."

Fast-forward to 1994, when both Souder and Fattah won election to the House of Representatives -- Souder as one of 73 Republicans, Fattah one of only 14 Democrats. Souder concedes that, in the wake of the GOP Revolution, he didn't exactly grab Fattah's hand and go running off into the Land of Bipartisanship. "'94 through '96 wasn't exactly the time of coalition building," he acknowledges. Those years were only relevant in that the two men "got to know each other some, and we got along well. We started looking for opportunities to work together" to build on the middle ground so evident a decade before when Souder witnessed the success that Fattah's parents helped create.

Souder wasn't completely new to the idea of working with a member of the Congressional Black Caucus. Around that same time, he'd been sweating to develop a social services block grant on charitable giving when Virginia Democratic Rep. Bobby Scott, first elected in 1992, approached him. Scott encouraged Souder to modify his bill so it would work well for charitable giving to low-income urban neighborhoods as well. That was fine with Souder, who notes that, despite his interest in the issue, "low income neighborhoods don't have a lot of Republican congressmen," so he was happy for the input. Political pragmatism was involved in Souder's work with Scott too. "By getting Bobby, and, of course, Chaka [on board with my amendment], there really wasn't any aggressive opposition to my amendment," he says. "And once you begin to build a little level of trust, you're able to break through."

Soon GEAR UP reared its head and Souder and Fattah were able to work together as well. Then calling the bill "High Hopes" (reportedly changed by Republicans because it too easily recalled a certain Democratic president's Sinatra-sung campaign theme song), Fattah thought GEAR UP was the perfect opportunity to reach across the great partisan divide to Souder. "When there are opportunities to work together, we try to seek them out," Fattah says. "Some things are just not political. We don't talk about educating Democrats or educating Republicans. We're educating children."

His rhetoric was even more fine-tuned when he pitched his GOP friend: Fattah sold GEAR UP to Souder as an exemplification of Reagan's pull yourself up by your bootstraps ideals. "If Chaka had come at it in an aggressively partisan fashion, I don't know that it would have worked," Souder says. "But his pitch was geared to appeal to us as conservatives. He didn't say that these kids needed help because of past discrimination, or because Republicans have kept them down. He said, 'This is a group of people who want the opportunity to succeed. This is a Republican idea!' It was such that it enabled us to make a

coalition between neo-liberals and neo-cons. Because neo-cons are willing to use limited government in order to eventually liberate people from government altogether."

Most bills are born DOA, and even many of those that get marked-up in committee die. As Goodling pushed his committee closer to the time to mark up the higher-ed bill, in the early months of 1998, it became increasingly important that Souder go from merely co-sponsoring Fattah's bill to lobbying Goodling to allow it to be heard in full committee.

Souder says Goodling pressured him against supporting GEAR UP. "You can't do this," Goodling insisted, according to Souder. "You shouldn't be delivering votes for the president's No. 1 initiative."

"That's a reasonable political argument," Souder says, "but it's not a substantive one."

Scarborough started hearing about GEAR UP. Knowing that he and Souder were of similar minds when it came to concern for the poor -- the two had worked together in naming a Justice Department building after Robert F. Kennedy -- Scarborough asked Souder to tell him about Fattah's amendment. Soon Scarborough was supporting Fattah's bill, and McIntosh, Upton and Peterson followed.

"Then Goodling was double-mad at me," Souder says.

Goodling's anger subsided soon enough; both Fattah and Souder point out that no one should be under the impression that their work on GEAR UP is the new standard for legislating.

"The reality is, 90 percent of the time on issues we're going to have disagreements and come from very different perspectives," Fattah says. "I have one of the most partisan voting records in the House, I've been an outspoken critic of the Republican majority, and one of the most ardent defenders of the Clinton administration" during the whole Lewinsky mess.

Indeed, after GEAR UP passed the Senate, and Souder was attending the White House ceremony at which President Clinton signed the Education Reauthorization Act into law -- at the time of impeachment's fever pitch, in October 1998 -- the Republican's top goal was to stay out of any photographs with the president.

But Clinton approached Souder and thanked him, noting that it took courage for him to attend. "Then Chaka pops up, and says, 'Mark was the key vote,'" Souder says, laughing. Clinton started riffing on education and "Chaka started calling photographers over."

There are other noteworthy examples of left-right cooperation in the often polarized House. In 1996, for instance, the civil rights interests of North Carolina liberal Democrat Rep. Mel Watt coincided with the libertarian views of Idaho's far-right Republican Rep. Helen Chenoweth, and the Chenoweth-Watt amendment on habeas corpus protections was born. But Watt warns against reading too much into their cooperation. "I remember people saying it was strange," Watt recalls, "but to say that it was some sort of coalition building with the class of '94 would be an overstatement. I don't even know what class she belongs to."

Souder hopes that reaching out to Fattah -- and into urban areas -- becomes the necessary next step in the Republican Revolution, what all-but-anointed GOP nominee Bush has been calling compassionate conservatism. "I hope it will be a pattern over time," Souder says. "If the Republican Party doesn't move on it, the Republican Party will go the way of the dinosaur. We need to work out creative ways to work with blacks and Hispanics. We increasingly seem like an isolated party. So [GEAR UP] is definitely something to build on. But I don't want to overestimate it." On whether this will be a paradigm for the

future of the GOP, Souder says, "School's still out."

A Chance for College
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E. J. Dionne Jr.

Martin Luther King Jr. spoke of a faith that would enable people "to hew out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope." In the midst of last week's depressing debate over impeachment, such a stone appeared in Washington in the form of the High Hopes scholarship initiative.

It's the brainchild of Rep. Chaka **Fattah**, a liberal Democrat from Philadelphia, and the fruit of his alliance and friendship with Rep. Mark Souder, a conservative Republican from Indiana.

At the heart of the proposal, signed into law last week by President Clinton as part of the Higher Education bill, is a very simple idea: Students in high poverty areas will receive certificates from the federal government in the sixth and seventh grades listing the federal grants and loans that will be available to pay for their college educations. No big deal, you might say. Just a piece of paper. Not so, say **Fattah** and Souder. "For the children of most middle-class families, that college is an option after high school is taken for granted," they declared in a joint statement. "For most poor children, college is not even in the picture. No one they know has gone to college."

The inspiration behind the certificates comes from private efforts to encourage inner-city students to achieve by promising them money for college if they do well. Among the best known are Ruth Wright Hayre's "Tell Them We Are Rising" program in Philadelphia and Eugene Lang's "I Have a Dream" plan in New York City.

To these approaches, **Fattah's** measure adds mentoring programs for kids in high poverty schools through their senior year, and grants for partnerships between middle schools, high schools and degree-granting colleges.

One of the best kept secrets of social policy is that one-on-one mentoring is enormously successful -- but we need more mentors. And universities worry that cutbacks in affirmative action will reduce the diversity of their student bodies. They could usefully help prepare kids for college long before the applications start trickling in.

Fattah knows that many inner-city schools aren't up to the task of preparing kids for college, so he also included incentives for participating schools to "improve their core curriculums" and include all the "gateway courses" required for college admission.

Giving poor children a chance to go to college, of course, requires more than a declaration. It means repairing broken schools. That will take both reform and money. These will come only when fixing inner-city education becomes a central question for American politics.

That's a long way off, perhaps. But you can develop some hope for new political possibilities when you hear **Fattah** and Souder talk about each other.

Souder got to know **Fattah's** family when, as an aide to former senator Dan Coats (R-Ind.), he visited a home for troubled youth, the House of Umoja in West Philadelphia -- run by **Fattah's** parents. "This wasn't in a vacuum," Souder says.

Souder will tell you that he is "most defined by the fact that I'm an evangelical Christian." Like most seriously religious people, he does not think faith gives you a license to judge everyone else but then ignore your own responsibilities to the suffering. "Christ is concerned about the needy and the hungry and the powerless and the hurting."

While skeptical of government, Souder still sees it as having a legitimate role. He thinks conservatives should operate on this principle: "If somebody is willing to work and make it, how do we do everything we can to make this happen?"

Fattah, in the meantime, is a smart politician. He knew he needed White House support and enlisted Clinton's top economic adviser, Gene Sperling, who developed an interest in college programs for the poor when he was a student at the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School.

"I started thinking to myself: Colleges ought to be doing the Eugene Lang model," Sperling said in an interview. "Why don't colleges reach out to sixth- and seventh-graders and stay with them all the way to their senior year? You're building the pool."

Finally, **Fattah** knew that in a Republican Congress, he needed Republican support. Souder came through. "When it came to the crucial vote," **Fattah** says, with some gratitude, "Mark was the only one to speak in favor of this."

Not much good is happening in Washington these days. But **Fattah** and Souder will tell you: It doesn't have to be that way.

Money Still Matters; Unequal spending on school systems may constitute a civil rights violation.

The Washington Post

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BYLINE: E. J. Dionne Jr.

"Put your money where your mouth is" and "talk is cheap" are cliches for good reason. Take education: You could fill whole libraries with speeches on how important education is to the new economy. But rarely does the speechmaker show you the money.

For decades now, states have struggled with an uncomfortable fact: Wealthy school districts spend a lot more money educating their children than poor districts do. The disparity calls into question whether we're as committed as we claim to equal opportunity. In most states education is financed at least in part through property taxes. That means wealthy school districts can spend more and still tax at lower rates than their poorer neighbors. They have more property, and more expensive property, to tax.

So even when parents in the poor districts want to pour more money into their children's schools, they face a bad choice: If they raise their property taxes too much, they drive out industry and other homeowners, leaving themselves worse off than before. The children are stuck.

But a newly fashionable argument would take the money issue off the table. It asserts that some school systems are so broken that any new money spent on kids wouldn't matter. What matters is not money but "reform."

There's something to be said for this view, but not if it becomes a dodge. This city -- along with one of its younger members of Congress -- has decided to put the money issue back on the table. On Monday Philadelphia Mayor Ed Rendell and a group of city officials went to court to sue the state government. They charged that state education aid formulas discriminate against minority students. As Dale Mezzacappa reported in the Philadelphia Inquirer, the suit is apparently the first in the nation to assert that state education formulas violate federal civil rights laws.

Rendell and his allies make a good case that something is amiss -- and that the funding problem is getting worse. As it is, Philadelphia spends \$ 1,600 less per pupil each year than the average of 61 school districts in the four counties surrounding the city, according to the suit. And Rendell, who has been a fiscally prudent mayor, is not about to raise taxes when he is trying to attract new business to his city. "We have no more local revenue to give," he says.

The issue of race is what gives the city a legal hook to try to make this a federal case. But the funding gap would be important no matter what color the students were. And that's why Rep. Chaka **Fattah**, a second-term Philadelphia congressman, is pushing a bill to make it easier for other school districts around the country to sue in federal court to equalize school funding within their states. He would also create new federal incentives -- and tougher rules on federal aid -- to encourage states to end large spending disparities among school districts.

Fattah is a realist and does not expect his bill to pass Congress any time soon. But he wants to put the money issue front-and-center, arguing that it is simply unfair to poor children not only in inner cities but also in rural areas that wealthy suburban districts can spend three or four times more per child. In some

parts of the country, the gap between poor rural districts and suburban areas is even greater.

Fattah acknowledges that money alone won't solve the problems of broken schools. He favors reforms to push responsibility down to the local school, to make teachers more accountable and to end the use of school systems as dumping grounds for patronage and nepotism.

He also agrees that many poor children suffer not simply from what happens in the schools but also from family breakup, neighborhood violence and other forms of social breakdown. All the more reason, he says, to try to give poor children at least as much support as better-off children already get. "You have a child starting from a deficit position, and then we are compounding that in the schools."

Our country's education debate is too often a shell game. Defenders of failed schools try to change the subject to unequal spending. Opponents of equalizing spending point to educational horror stories and say reform, not money, is what matters.

The truth is that money and reform both matter. That's not news to parents. Perhaps Rendell and **Fattah** will spread this inconvenient view to quarters that would prefer to keep refighting the old battles.

Clinton raises students' hopes

The Tampa Tribune

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BYLINE: MARSHA MERCER

Hardly anyone noticed when President Clinton rolled out his latest education initiative. The country has a bad case of Monicamania, and that was too bad for "High Hopes for College," a plan Clinton said could steer a million impoverished students into college over five years.

Its 21st Century Scholar certificates and college-school "mentoring" partnerships are worth a closer look.

With affirmative action mired in controversy, High Hopes could lead to a new way of equalizing opportunity for low-income students of all races. It's winning bipartisan support on Capitol Hill. The idea borrows from philanthropists who adopt classes in inner-city elementary schools and promise students free college if they stay in school.

The I Have a Dream program, started in 1981 in East Harlem by Eugene Lang, and similar projects around the country have an impressive success rate. But they reach only a fraction of the children who are growing up on mean streets with little chance of breaking out.

President Clinton, who hopes to make education his legacy, has proposed tax credits, scholarships and education IRAs, among other things, but he contends they aren't enough. More must be done, he said, to keep students from dropping out. Vice President Gore recently announced a \$ 600 million effort aimed at helping at-risk Hispanic students.

Under Clinton's High Hopes plan, Uncle Sam would intervene when children are in sixth grade, promising four-year college tuition grants to those who graduate from high school and setting up "mentoring" programs to keep these students on track.

His 1999 budget included a modest \$ 140 million for High Hopes, with provision for \$ 210 million in 2000 and 2001. Clinton invited scores of college presidents, members of Congress and administration officials to a White House ceremony unveiling the program last week.

The Marine Band played in the Grand Foyer, magnolias beat against the East Room windows in a furious rainstorm and scandal hovered over the crowd like a ghost, but Clinton was upbeat as he talked about the federal government becoming a "guardian angel" for disadvantaged students. Calling on his own experiences, Clinton said, "Nobody in my family had ever been to college before, but by the time I got out of Ramble Grade School in Hot Springs, Ark., I never had any doubt I was going to college.

"My family told me I was going to college. All my teachers told me I was going to college. All the people at my church told me I was going to college. It never occurred to me that I wouldn't go to college. ... I was in an environment which made it very difficult for me to fail. That's the environment I want for every child in America."

High Hopes incorporates a bill introduced in the House by Rep. Chaka **Fattah**, D-Pa. It would create a 21st Century Scholars Program targeting sixth- and seventh-graders in communities where poverty exceeds 75 percent. The government would present each family with a certificate detailing how much college aid in Pell Grants the student will be entitled to receive if he or she stays in school and gets good

grades.

"So, they will never have any doubt that if they do their part, they can, in fact, go on to college," Clinton said.

Fattah's bill has attracted 118 cosponsors, including a few Republicans. He points out that these low-income students would be eligible for Pell Grants anyway. But too often the students get sidetracked. "If they go down the side roads of life - high school dropout, teenage pregnancy, truancy, antisocial activities - it will tax us all individually and tax the nation," **Fattah** said.

To make the college dream come alive, High Hopes would foster partnerships between middle and high schools and colleges and universities. Working with community and religious groups and parents, the partnerships would provide information about what college is like and how to prepare for it. There would be college visits and summer programs.

Trained mentors and role models would tutor, counsel and help the youngsters all year, through high school. The White House estimates that in five years, the program would reach 3,000 middle and junior high schools and more than a million students.

"We have to make mentorship a way of life in America," Clinton said. He added that more than 300 college presidents and dozens of education, religious, service and civil rights groups have endorsed the plan.

Plan Gives College Guidance to Poor

AP Online

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Children from poor families would have the chance to pair up with mentors, tutors, and counselors as early as grade six to gear them toward college, under a new plan announced by President Clinton.

Clinton unveiled the \$140 million effort Wednesday, saying there are plenty of poor children "who just need a little spark to go on to great things."

The High Hopes for College program aims to provide children from disadvantaged families with support to guide them to college and brighter futures. Clinton's fiscal 1999 budget allots \$140 million and an additional \$70 million to be phased in during 2000 and 2001 for the program. "Now, we have to make sure that all our students, especially those from our hardest-pressed families, have a guardian angel helping to guide them to those doors, and to make sure they are ready to walk through them," Clinton said Wednesday.

Under Clinton's proposal, colleges would form partnerships with middle and junior-high schools that have large concentration of children from low-income families. The president hopes to reach more than 1 million students at 3,000 middle schools over the next five years.

By working with parents, churches, local businesses and community groups, children in the program would receive information on the significance of attending college. They would receive help as minor as filling out a college application, and as major as taking part in trips to campuses, summer programs and after-school activities to whet their appetites for college.

They also would have to take tougher classes to prepare them for the academic rigors of post-secondary education. Their parents would receive a "21st Century Scholar" certificate that spells out the amount of college aid for which their children would be eligible, Clinton said, "so they will never have any doubt that if they do their part, they can, in fact, go on to college."

The president compared himself to the students his program wants to reach. He said that although he was from a poor family and had never seen a relative go to college, he never doubted he'd get a college degree because every one told him that he would.

"I was in an environment which made it very difficult for me to fail," Clinton said. "That's the environment I want for every child in America.

"In every community in this country, there are children with enormous ability who just need a little spark to go on to great things," Clinton said. "We have to have high hopes for all of our children, and we have to make them know that they can have high hopes for themselves."

The program was the brainchild of Rep. Chaka **Fattah**, D-Pa., who patterned it after programs in Philadelphia that provide disadvantaged students with mentors, tuition assistance and general encouragement.

"These young people ... are the future of our country, and the choices that they make in their lives will

either tax our society or benefit our society," **Fattah** said. "This life that these young people have been given is not a dress rehearsal. This initiative challenges them to do their absolute best."

Mr. Fattah Goes To Washington

Rookie Of The Year Chaka Fattah Rode To Congress On A Landslide Problem Is, So Did The Other

PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER

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Memo: Vanessa Williams is The Inquirer's city political writer.

By Vanessa Williams

THE TINY PLANE IS EN ROUTE to Washington, violently bouncing just above the Maryland treetops splashed garnet and amber, just below an azure autumn sky. The cabin is ringing with the engine's irritating buzz.

"People who call my American Cities Initiative pie in the sky - well, let them come up with a better plan and let the people choose."

It's 1991, and State Sen. Chaka Fattah, candidate for Congress, is on his way to meet with members of the Urban Caucus of the U.S. House about his plan to bail out the nation's 100 biggest cities. He has been talking nonstop since the four-seater took off from Philadelphia, ignoring the tummy-tickling dips that take the aircraft a little too close to the trees.

"I mean, this country spends billions on defense, and we don't even have a foreign threat anymore! The Soviet Union is gone!"

He is apparently oblivious to the heart-stopping lurches.

"That's why I've got to go to Congress now. The people can't wait. They need relief now!"

As the plane continues its acrobatics and Fattah continues his sermonizing, it seems reasonable to wonder whether the turbulence is being caused by the brisk breeze outside or the hot air inside. Or if this self-proclaimed urban apostle is so enraptured by his own rhetoric that he might just leap out of the plane and try to fly to D.C. on sheer force of will.

The plane made it to Washington that afternoon. But Chaka Fattah, despite the hustle of his youthful political machine and his own impassioned message, didn't make it to Congress. Running in a special election against three other candidates and the Democratic Party's big lever, the best Fattah could manage was a distant second place behind longtime party warhorse Lucien E. Blackwell.

So it was Blackwell who went to Congress in 1991 to complete William H. Gray 3d's unexpired term; Blackwell who, with the backing of the Philadelphia political establishment, stayed for a term of his own; Blackwell who got to be in Washington when the Democrats ruled both houses of Congress and the White House.

And Chaka Fattah, the young turk who had challenged the Democratic establishment regularly during his 10 years in office, had to chill in Harrisburg for a few more winters.

On a raw Saturday morning in November 1993, Fattah announced he was going to try to make that trip to Washington again: He was going to challenge Blackwell for the Democratic nomination in Pennsylvania's Second Congressional District. At the announcement, on the steps of Shoemaker Middle School, he stood with his family, longtime friends, and a couple dozen pint-sized players from the Roxborough Eagles community football team. No influential elected officials, no big-shot ward leaders, no name-brand campaign operatives. The Democratic elite - Rendell, Street, Fumo, Evans - still stood firm behind Blackwell.

It didn't matter. On May 10, Fattah and his machine emerged like a stealth bomber. He annihilated Blackwell, beating him by 16 percentage points. And in November, when a GOP juggernaut crushed Democrats from coast to coast, Chaka Fattah defied the trend: He won his seat with 85 percent of the vote, the largest margin of victory for any incoming freshman in Congress.

Now it is a sunny morning in the fall of 1994, and Rep.-elect Chaka Fattah is cruising to Washington in a Metroliner club car.

The ride is smooth, and the train hums along the tracks, past gritty rowhouses in Chester and the glassy towers of downtown Baltimore.

Fattah nibbles at a slice of honeydew melon, a little bland because it is not quite ripe. His attention is divided among four newspapers and a reporter who is wondering if his victory, like the melon, is out of season and therefore not as sweet as it would have been had he gone to Congress three years earlier.

He sidesteps the question. "If you look where I started out, arriving in the United States Congress is a great personal accomplishment. . . . It is an exception, not the rule in politics." Chaka Fattah has dreamed of going to Congress since he visited freshman Bill Gray 15 years ago in the Capitol. A few extra Republicans are not going to stop him from enjoying it.

But even in a Democrat-controlled Congress, Fattah would have chafed in the role of rookie. Surely he must be anxious about the limits on a minority party?

"I would like to be in the majority, but I don't feel handcuffed in terms of my ability to do anything because I'm in the minority," he says. After all, he notes, Democrats were the minority party in Harrisburg for most of his 12-year Pennsylvania legislative career.

"And hey, I've been a minority all my life," adds Fattah, now Philadelphia's highest-ranking black elected official.

"Let's get it on."

LEAVING UNION STATION AND HAILING a cab for Capitol Hill, he seems at once the junior congressman going to an important meeting and an excited teenager on a field trip. Six feet tall, wearing a charcoal suit and white shirt with monogrammed cuffs, he has gray sprinkled in his hair; but there is a boyish bounce in his step, and he can't seem to stop smiling.

For the onetime block boy who aspired to be a member of his big brother's street gang, Capitol Hill is the ultimate turf. And for the Penn graduate who gets his kicks out of tinkering with social issues, Congress is the Ivy League of policy wonks.

The taxi pulls up at the Capitol, Fattah tells the cabbie to keep the change, and he bounds up the steps on the east side of the dome. A guide gives him directions - "down two chandeliers and on the right" - to the spacious suite of the majority whip of the House of Representatives.

The room is a bit chilly, as if the ill wind that had swept across the country, blasting the Democrats' out of their four-decade hold on the House, had reached the threshold of this office and begun seeping under the door.

"We'll be moving," says Sarah Dufendach, administrative assistant to the whip. She looks around the room, a formal space with blue walls that soar toward a high ceiling. Several chairs upholstered in red, white and blue are arranged among dark, antique-looking tables and cabinets. "The minority (whip's) office is much smaller."

Rep. David Bonior of Michigan finishes a phone call and joins Fattah, taking a seat on the sofa. Fattah settles easily in a chair.

Bonior, who replaced Bill Gray as whip, is a key member of the Democratic leadership that controls committee assignments. Most freshmen take what they get, usually the most unglamorous minor committees. So will Fattah. But today he is lobbying, and lobbying hard, to get on an unglamorous major committee - Rules.

"Yes, I know that it's hard for a freshman to get on that committee, but that's my first choice."

Though largely invisible to the electorate, and not as powerful as Ways and Means or Appropriations, the Rules Committee is one of the most important in the House. Every piece of legislation that gets to the floor must pass through it, where committee members determine the game plan by which a bill lives or dies: how long it can be debated, how many times it can come up for a vote, and how many amendments that can be attached. Rules is an insider's committee, and it can be the perfect training ground for a future House leader.

"I talked to Gephardt and he said he would consider it." That's Richard A. Gephardt, the majority-soon-to-be-minority leader.

"I have extensive legislative background, six years in the (Pennsylvania) House and six in the Senate."

As Fattah makes his pitch, Bonior nods, his beard and glasses making him look more like a college professor than a powerful congressional leader. He listens attentively; after all, few freshmen ask to be on the Rules Committee.

But having lost the majority, he explains, the Democrats' slots on the committee will be slashed from nine to four.

"I know, but there's usually a freshman appointed," Fattah counters. Bonior nods again.

Fattah is politely pushing, making his case with the posture of someone who understands that it's a long shot, but wants to make sure he's in the running next time around.

"I don't know if you know, but I raised \$32,000 for the D-triple-C," he says, referring to the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee.

"Oh? We certainly appreciate the effort," Bonior says. He notes that the committee will need to raise millions to try to reclaim the majority in 1996.

"I'll do whatever I can to help," Fattah says.

They chat a little more about what must be done for the party to return to power. Before the conversation ends, Fattah mentions once more his desire to be on the committee. Bonior permits himself an amused smile.

"I can't make you any promises, but I appreciate your interest."

"Well, thank you," Fattah says, as he stands and shakes the whip's hand. (Fattah eventually was assigned to the Small Business and Government Operations Committees, as well as the party's Democratic Policy Committee.)

Out in the corridor, Fattah is asked if he isn't worried that he turned Bonior off - pushing for an improbable committee assignment, dropping names, flaunting his fund-raising effort.

Sure, he acknowledged, he ran the risk of coming off as cocky. But he also could have impressed Bonior as being confident, eager, hardworking - a good prospect for the Democratic team.

"Ambition can be a cross or a crown and more often than not it's both," Fattah says later. "Yeah, I am ambitious. I think there's nobody in politics who is not ambitious. . . . The question is, What has my ambition and my other positive and negative attributes been able to produce in terms of results?"

"Today, in Germantown, in West Philadelphia, hundreds of units of affordable housing exist because we decided to be ambitious about building affordable housing. Look at all the young people who have gone to graduate school" - Fattah sponsors an annual conference that awards scholarships to minority students to pursue advanced degrees - "the people who have left the welfare rolls and are now working, people who have gotten into drug-treatment programs. To do the things we've done take a sense of ambition. . . . I don't see why that should be a threat to anyone."

"It's funny how people admire ambition in most professional circumstances. People who are ambitious in business create companies, in journalism they win Pulitzer Prizes. In politics we win elections."

CURTIS JONES' FACE LIGHTS UP WHEN he remembers Chaka Fattah's first

election.

Jones was a 21-year-old junior at Millersville University in Lancaster County when his buddy Chaka, a 22-year-old student at Community College of Philadelphia, came up to visit one weekend in 1978. They were listening to music in his room, and during a break in an album, Fattah had an idea.

"He said, Do you know there's an election next year for this office where we can educate people about the election process and put the Youth Movement in a real position of power? I said, No, what office is that?

"He said, The City Commissioners' Office."

A few years back, Fattah and Jones had started the Youth Movement to Clean Up Politics, the junior wing of the black political insurrection that had been building during the 1970s. For decades the city's Democratic Party had been run much like a plantation, with its large African American voting bloc providing the ballots to keep white politicians in power. The handful of black people holding office had been anointed by party leaders; it was about time for the community to start picking its own candidates.

Fattah was a student at Shoemaker Junior High in West Philadelphia when activist lawyer Hardy Williams, then a candidate for mayor, led a march past the school chanting "Power to the people!"

He jumped into the parade. Fattah signed up as a campaign volunteer, handing out leaflets, tacking up posters, joining the cheering section at marches and rallies. Later, as students at Overbrook High, he and Jones recruited volunteers from schools throughout the city. The Youth Movement held its own voter registration drives and candidate forums.

Making sure African Americans were registered to vote - and had fair and easy access to the polls - was key to the success of the black political movement. Who in Philadelphia oversees voter registration and the election process? The three city commissioners.

That was why Chaka Fattah was asking Jones to run with him for commissioner. Jones was game.

There were a few problems.

"We didn't even own a suit," says Jones. Nor had they ever run for public office - not even for Democratic committeeman, the most local of elected posts, which can be won with as few as a dozen votes from the neighbors on the block. The commissioners race is a citywide contest, in which the top two vote getters from each party face off for three slots. It would take tens of thousands of votes to win a seat.

No money? Fattah and Jones found a benefactor to buy them suits and dress shoes. A '60s-holdover group called the Resistance Press printed their campaign flyers at cost. A West Philadelphia businessman donated office space. Eventually, they raised about \$7,000.

No campaign guru? Each day during the spring 1979 campaign, Jones and Fattah would call the mayoral candidates' offices and get their schedules; then they'd show up at the same places and demand to be heard. Looking innocent and earnest in their donated suits, the pair had undeniable crowd appeal. Often people in the audience would take up for them - "Yeah, let the kids speak!"

By the end of the campaign, Fattah had won the endorsements of The Inquirer - which called him "perhaps the most knowledgeable and most enthusiastic candidate" - and the Bulletin.

In a field of 24 Democrats, Fattah came in fourth. Jones placed eighth.

Only after it was over did it come to light that neither man was old enough to qualify for the job. You have to be 25 to be a city commissioner.

Jones says he and Fattah had realized that all along. "We wanted somebody to challenge us so we could go to court and argue that if we were old enough to die for our country we were old enough run for office."

Nobody challenged them because nobody knew. The qualifications for the office were listed neither in the Home Rule Charter nor the election code, but in an obscure ordinance.

"We had a lot of fun, we got to see the city and meet a lot of people," Fattah says now. "It was the foundation for the building of a political organization that has a great deal of credibility in Philadelphia today."

THE FATTAH ORGANIZATION'S FIRST victory was a 58-vote squeaker in 1982. Fattah upset State Rep. Nicholas Pucciarelli, candidate of the long-reigning Overbrook political machine. He became the youngest person ever elected to the Pennsylvania General Assembly.

Over the next decade, Fattah would test and fine-tune his campaign apparatus in a number of primary races against the Democratic Party or one of its warlords. Today his is one of the city's most effective independent political operations.

Comprising mostly young African Americans who work in government, corporations and community and nonprofit agencies - many of them holdovers from the Youth Movement - it feeds Fattah an almost unlimited supply of talent, time and tenacity. Core members of the organization sign a "mission statement" in which they pledge to bring "all of the intelligence, initiative and caring at my disposal to the tasks before me."

"We basically pledge to give up our firstborn," laughs Raymond Jones, 31, Fattah's press aide.

In a campaign street fight, the Fattah organization is tough. Workers descend on neighborhoods with armloads of campaign literature, stuffing mail slots with Fattah's message; they attack utility polls with staple guns, lining the streets with Fattah's face; they recruit friends and coworkers to hold kaffeeklatsches and big-ticket fund-raisers,

raising cash for Fattah's war chest.

Their energy was evident in the battle with Blackwell last year. Picture the scene at the Mount Airy Day festival, the Saturday before the May 10 primary.

Both candidates had listed the event on their schedules. When the festival got under way that morning, Fattah's organization was in place. There were tables filled with campaign brochures, newspaper clippings, and blue and white "Fattah for Congress" buttons. People wearing Fattah's portrait on their T-shirts and baseball caps worked the crowd. A little before noon a yellow school bus showed up, and a children's drill team emerged: When it stepped off, Fattah was out front, waving to people who yelled his first name as he strode up Germantown Avenue.

Women at a nearby beauty parlor ran outside, their tresses dripping, to wave and squeal as he passed. Motorists honked and teenagers bopped alongside the mini-parade. By the time Fattah was escorted into the main festival area, dozens in the racially mixed, middle-class crowd were wearing his buttons and clutching his literature.

"Where the hell is Blackwell?" an off-duty journalist who happened to be there asked. "He'd better hurry up and get here. Fattah's got his people all over this place!"

Blackwell never showed up.

AT 38, FATTAH HAS A LONG AND SUCCESSful political past and the potential for an unlimited future.

The Second District is his, carved in his image - indeed, he had a finger on the knife. When districts were reapportioned in 1992, Fattah pushed for shifting some predominantly black North Philadelphia wards to the First District. This not only opened up an opportunity for a second black member of Congress from Philadelphia, but it also opened up an opportunity for a would-be congressman named Chaka Fattah: the axed wards were those in which Blackwell had run strongest in the 1991 special election.

"Brilliant," is how one veteran politician describes it. The new Second District is 80 percent Democratic and nearly 70 percent black and takes in a big chunk of the city's middle- and working-class communities: neighborhoods where retirees are active in block clubs and parents attend PTA meetings. Independent-minded, issue-oriented residents who turn out on election day.

Fattah plays well with these kinds of voters. Well-versed and well-spoken, he can hold his own in a debate. His staff provides position papers, brochures and booklets to explain his work in welfare reform, job training, education and housing.

And he succeeds with the broader electorate as well. He has cachet with the city's corporate heads: During the 1990 fiscal crisis he persuaded 20 corporations to make advanced payments on their city wage taxes, raising \$32 million in quick cash to help the city meet its payroll. He has credibility with the anti-drug crusaders who march on inner-city streets. Though he is an up-from-the-streets black politician, he does not threaten or outrage most white voters.

So while Fattah has to run for his seat every two years, it is basically safe. Unless there is a radical change in his style or a major scandal, the voters of his district are the least likely obstacles to his success in Congress.

That will be determined more by how he fits into an institution steeped in tradition and protocol. And Fattah will have a harder time rising above the crowd: Congress is twice as large as the Pennsylvania General Assembly, 10 times bigger than the state Senate. Not even his unusual name will stick out: look at Kweisi Mfume of Maryland, or Julius Caesar Watts of Oklahoma.

Not to mention Newt Gingrich.

Fattah mentions an interview he'd seen with the new majority leader. "He said his father was a letter carrier, he had a funny name, and he's going to be the speaker of the House of Representatives. Well, my father was a laborer and I've got a funny name. And I'm not the speaker of the House, but, hey. . . ."

FIRST THINGS FIRST. WHAT CAN AN AMBItious freshman in the minority party do to get ahead in Congress?

Work hard and play nice, says Jim Greenwood, a former Harrisburg colleague and tennis buddy.

U.S. Rep. James Greenwood, a Bucks County Republican, served in the state Senate before being elected to Congress two years ago - when his party was in the minority.

"It's very important how he relates to the majority members of his committees or subcommittees. There is a fine line between being an adversary but also being congenial," Greenwood said.

One way is to play the congressional version of teacher's pet. Greenwood says he would go to hearings of his subcommittee and - pay attention, now - stay all day long. "That's important because sometimes the only person left in the room after six or seven hours of testimony is the subcommittee chairman," who by definition is a member of the majority party. "If you're there, you're literally keeping him company." Sometimes he'd end up going to lunch with the chair, getting a chance to talk and become friends. "The very next day we could be challenging each other in a debate, but I could get my legislation moved or my language in a bill."

Despite Fattah's combative political image, Greenwood says his work earned him the respect of his GOP peers in Harrisburg. (Fattah's tennis game, he hints, was another matter.) As members of the education committee, Fattah and Greenwood teamed up to write a bill limiting teacher strikes in Pennsylvania.

"I know Chaka Fattah pretty well," Greenwood says. "He's sophisticated and is not abrasive by nature. I think those things will argue well for him, but he needs to avoid just immediately alienating himself from the majority party. . . . If he becomes one of the gang that regularly troops to the microphone and does nothing but go on for hours with vitriolics, he will be discounted quickly by the Republicans."

Fattah himself thinks he's as likely to irritate members on his own side of the aisle as the other. He's worried that the Democrats will chase after the voters they lost to the GOP in the fall, running even further away from the people and problems of urban America. If that is where his party is headed, he is not prepared to follow.

"This notion of the political center, I think it's a selfish and self-centered approach, at least the way it's been articulated. I think if the question is, where is the moral center in terms of doing what's right, or the sensible center in terms of a practical kind of public policy focusing on what works, that's fine. But if the idea is, Well, let's get to the center or midway up this mountain to get as far away as we can from the people who are at the bottom, then I think it's unwise and inappropriate for the nation's future."

One thing he's sure of: "Democrats can't out-Republican the Republicans." He tenses and his expression comes as close as it ever does to annoyed when he talks about how the party should stop licking its wounds, put away the white flag and take on the GOP.

"I think it was Dwight Eisenhower who once said a party without an ideology is nothing but a conspiracy to steal power. . . . The point is if you're against the death penalty, you're against the death penalty, whether it earns you a few votes or loses you a few votes. You've got to take a stand, you can't waffle. . . .

"For the last 40 years the Super Bowl for Congress has been played every two years. We won 19, they won one. It's not a time to throw up your hands, get rid of your quarterback and all that. All we have to do is shore up the basics, get some good candidates, and our voters will come home."

MIKE JOYNES MET FATTAH IN FIRST grade at Durham Elementary School at 16th and Lombard Streets. Back then, the future congressman was a shy small-fry named Arthur Davenport. Joynes remembers him as a kid who "wore goofy glasses and they were always askew on his face, which made him look even goofier."

Number four in a family of six boys, Arthur idolized his older brother Robin, a member of the fearsome Clymer Street gang that ruled his neighborhood during the mid-'60s. Arthur called himself Little Rob.

Their mother, the widowed Frankee Davenport, worked as a journalist for the Philadelphia Tribune and did freelance pieces for other black publications. Little Rob the wannabe gang member was about 12 when she - already more interested in working in the black nationalist movement than writing about it - met and married a community activist, David Fattah.

She changed her name to Falaka Fattah and gave her children African-inspired names. For Arthur she chose Chaka, in honor of the Zulu warrior king who battled the British colonialists in South Africa.

The family moved to West Philadelphia; their home in the 1400 block of North Frazier Street became a gathering place for nationalists. The Fattahs started a magazine called Umoja, the Swahili word for unity, and produced reports on issues

affecting African Americans. One of their first studies was Philadelphia's gang wars, which at the time were taking dozens of young men's lives each year. During her reporting, Falaka Fattah made a startling discovery: She found out about Robin's life on the street.

"Here I was researching gang activity, and I had a homegrown gang member," she now recalls.

Sister Fattah had never been a strict disciplinarian, spanking or yelling at her sons. Instead, she says, she had tried to explain to them why they had to go to school, or make curfew, or help around the house. She had set up a family council - with elected officers - and held meetings to discuss family matters. The council decided where to go for summer vacation, how to stretch the family budget, or what to do about an errant brother.

Instead of throwing Robin out, she proposed that his gang move in.

A family meeting was called and the issue debated. Chaka's younger brother Nasser remembers his mother's argument: "It was not so much that we wanted the gang in the house with us, but that we didn't want to have Robin in the street . . . that we could have lost him to the gangs. I think that made the decision very easy and very simple."

The vote was taken, and in 1968 the House of Umoja became a haven for battle-weary gang members. Chaka Fattah's home was suddenly home to as many as two dozen youths. There were high school dropouts and college students, ex- cons, and Vietnam War veterans.

"I thought it was great," Fattah recalls. "All my older brothers and his friends, they were my idols." And, he says, "having more than a dozen people with all kinds of perspectives and experiences - good and bad - was helpful in getting a more dynamic view of life."

He remembers "one guy named Obie, who had just come back from a tour in Vietnam. And there was another guy named Billy, a draft dodger who had spent time in Canada. So the great debate about the Vietnam War took place on a daily basis in my home."

He recalls learning how to play chess (one of his few pastime passions today) and picking up the latest dance steps (he's long since given up the club scene). He got tips on how to make love and how to hold his own in a street fight. He made lifelong friends, such as Curtis Jones, a former gang member who sought counseling at the house after a friend was stabbed to death in a rumble.

If he or his brothers felt any resentment toward their unconventional household then, they don't own up to it today. Their mother leavens the memories with a little humor: Falaka Fattah laughs so hard she can barely tell about the time one of the houseguests poked a hole in Chaka's new waterbed. "He didn't go and try to kill him," she says, "but I would say he was deflated, too."

Fattah's reputation as a leader and a practical dreamer developed as he worked with his parents on the House of Umoja. As the gang members outgrew the family house

on Frazier Street, Sister Fattah set her sights on a row of vacant houses on the block. But Umoja could not afford to buy the properties, which were owned by First Pennsylvania Bank. Chaka, then 14, had an idea: persuade the bank to donate the houses. He developed a proposal and made an appointment to see the bank president.

"I never discouraged Chaka with his great schemes, but I didn't think they'd get past the secretary," Sister Fattah recalls. She was amazed when, a few months later, the bank agreed to turn over the properties.

Nasser Fattah says his brother always thought of that kind of project - pulling out a victory for the House of Umoja - as more fun than work. The same delight is evident in Chaka's current devotion to his career. Joynes, his friend since grade school, says that when they talk today "the conversation is 85 percent politics."

"Oh, I'd say it was higher than that," says Fattah's wife, Patricia Renfroe. "He is consumed, totally consumed by it, but that's the reason he's so good at it."

Though she says he always makes time for his children - daughter Frances, 19, and

son Chaka Jr., 12, from his first marriage; and stepson Christian, 10 - Renfroe said Fattah's work commands "the lion's share of his time."

Renfroe, a lawyer, met Fattah 15 years ago when both were working for the city's Office of Housing. "We would go to community meetings and tours of the projects. I remember Chaka saying then there was just no reason why these families had to be confined to these high-rises and how difficult it must be for parents to raise children. . . . I was just taken aback by how somebody so young could have such an old head, if you will."

(Fattah continued to ruminate about high-rise public housing. Five years ago, he launched a campaign to persuade federal and local housing officials to relocate families to single-family units throughout the city. Next month, the Philadelphia Housing Authority will get rid of five of the eight high-rises at Raymond Rosen Homes.)

Renfroe says her husband has always been "very creative" and has "great ideas."

Except when it comes to dining. Fattah may be adventurous in politics, but he takes no chances with his food.

"For lunch, it's a turkey hoagie, a bag of chips, and Mountain Dew," says Renfroe. "If we go out to dinner and he goes to the men's room, I can order for him: fried flounder, french fries and a Coke. If there's a salad, French dressing. He never changes."

SOMETHING ELSE THAT NEVER CHANGES: Fattah's commitment to his urban agenda.

Fattah has lived in Philadelphia all his life. He loves the city, with its people of various hues and views, its rowhouse neighborhoods, and busy streets. If he can't persuade everyone else to love cities, too, he at least hopes to persuade them to care.

He likes to point out that the entire metropolitan area relies on Philadelphia International Airport, the SEPTA system, the city's universities, cultural institutions, and hospitals. "If you live in Bucks County and your child gets sick, you're going to bring your child to Children's Hospital of Philadelphia." He warns that failure to protect the city's physical and social infrastructure threatens the suburbs as well.

"The majority of Americans live in metropolitan areas and therefore are impacted to the degree that as the core decays - crime, poverty, drug use, child abuse - it moves out, it spreads to the suburbs surrounding that core. In the four counties surrounding Philadelphia those indicators are increasing. We've just seen an example of that in the Eddie Polec case.

"So, the suburbs are inextricably tied to the cities, and this beating up on cities is a false political argument."

Just as his parents realized that to save their son they had to save their neighbors' sons, he says, America has to sustain its cities if the nation is to thrive.

"If you look at how the NBA, the NFL, the national sports groups operate, they have a lottery or draft system in which they take the best new players and give them to the worst teams. And the reason why they take those resources and provide them to the teams that are least able to compete is that the leagues have an interest in having competitive teams because that draws spectators and makes money.

"I think there's a lot to be learned from that in public policy. This country would be much more productive if we had everyone in the game, if we focused our resources on lifting those boats stuck at the bottom."

CHAKA FATTAH WAS A TEENAGER WHEN he met Bill Gray. It was at the House of Umoja, and Gray had helped to secure a federal grant to help Sister Fattah renovate houses on the block.

One of the most successful Pennsylvania congressman in history, Gray zoomed to the number-three position in the House in a scant 12 years. At his peak he was one of the most influential politicians in Philadelphia - he steered millions of dollars to the city and played a major role in getting African American and women candidates elected to office. He was one of the top African American political figures in the country.

He recalls Fattah as a "very bright, very energetic" teenager who shared his parents' "spirit of community involvement."

As young Fattah got involved in politics, he worked in one of Gray's early campaigns. When Fattah challenged Pucciarelli and the party hierarchy in the 1982 state House race, Gray put up some money for the fight.

But over the next decade they were often adversaries. In 1989 they backed opposing candidates in the Democratic primary for district attorney. In the 1991 mayoral primary Gray backed former City Councilman George R. Burrell. Fattah backed Blackwell.

Gray chuckles as he recalls the skirmishes. At times, he says, "we had to spank him. It was unfortunate, but that's life." Despite their differences, Fattah never seemed to fall far from Gray's grace. Some political observers surmised Gray indulged Fattah because he saw some of himself in the brash young turk.

"I think he'll be a bright achiever," Gray says of Fattah now. "He impresses me as the kind of guy who's not going to sit around and wait for things to come to him. He's going to create opportunities."

It may be inevitable that people compare Fattah to him, but Gray thinks it is unfair to the new representative.

"What you really want to do is inspire your representative to be forward- looking and to be himself and to do his thing in the context of the 1990s," Gray says. "I did mine in the 1980s, and it was a totally different environment."

A few days after his primary victory, Fattah called Gray and asked to meet with him. The two spent four hours together; Fattah wanted to know what an aspiring freshman needed to do to succeed.

Gray's first advice: Now that Fattah had won the primary, he was as good as the congressman. So, start acting like one.

Fattah got started the following week. He began making almost weekly trips to Washington, paying courtesy calls on Democratic congressional leaders and White House officials. Early in the summer, Gray was surprised to bump into Fattah at the NAACP's Legal Defense Fund gala dinner, working the crowd.

But then, Chaka Fattah has always operated on fast forward. On his visit two months ago to party whip Bonior, he got out of the cab and headed for the nearest entrance to the Capitol.

"This entrance is for members only," he warned the reporter accompanying him. "I don't know if they'll let us in, but we can try it."

Sure enough, a "Members Only" sign greeted him at the door. So did two uniformed guards, one of whom said, "Members only." But the other looked up with recognition. "Oh, member-elect. Go ahead, sir."

Chaka Fattah flashed a grin, shoved his left hand into his pocket and strode into the House.

Caption:

PHOTO (6)

1. U.S. Rep. Chaka Fattah (Photo illustration by Matt Hollerbush) (COVER)
2. From the House of Umoja to the House of Representatives: Fattah in the Capitol's Statuary Hall. (Photography by Michael Bryant)
3. The congressman-elect (above) gets a first look at his new Washington office. (MICHAEL BRYANT)
4. Singing "We Shall Overcome" at Tindley Temple Methodist Church in 1989. (APRIL SAUL)
5. Falaka Fattah in 1985. (SARAH LEEN)
6. Chaka Fattah emerging from a polling place during his losing bid for Congress in 1991. (CHARLES FOX)

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Photos





Contact Us

If you would like to schedule an appointment with Congressman Fattah, please put the request in writing. Due to recent events, the mail delivery has slowed. To expedite your request, you may fax the scheduling information to:

Michelle Anderson Lee (202) 225-5392.

In Cyberspace (Via Computer)

Email:

<http://www.house.gov/writerep/>

Web:

www.house.gov/fattah

In Philadelphia, PA (2nd District Office)

Main Office:

4104 Walnut Street
Philadelphia, Pa. 19104
Phone: 215-387-6404

Northwest Regional Office:

6632 Germantown Avenue
Philadelphia, Pa. 19144
Phone: 215-848-9386

In Washington, DC (Nation's Capitol Office)

1205 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515
Phone: 202-225-4001
[Map On Mapquest](#)

District Staff

All constituent services are handled by the staff in Philadelphia, including the following issues: housing, military, postal, veterans, Social Security, Medicare, immigration, IRS, pension benefits, passports/visas, education, labor, service academy nominations, flag requests, and requests for White House tours. Please contact the staff in Philadelphia for assistance with these issues.

Washington Staff

In addition to supporting Congressman Fattah in his legislative duties, the Washington staff offers residents of the Second Congressional District assistance with legislative services. They can also assist you to get tickets to visit the House of Representatives and Senate Galleries while they are in session, and other available sites in Washington.